

Study of media literacy level in Kyrgyzstan

(Translation of selected parts of the original research)

Summary

The report presents outcomes of a sociological research commissioned by Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. The research was carried out by Public Foundation Media Policy Institute and sought to establish baseline level of media literacy among different groups of population through qualitative and quantitative study. It is expected that data collected during the research will make it possible to track changes in the media literacy level. The qualitative and quantitative study focused on assessment, analysis, access, creation and dissemination of content. Similar method was applied in studies conducted in the European Union and Russian Federation. Logical framework of media literacy in Kyrgyzstan was developed as an outcome of the research.

Key words: media literacy, critical thinking, Kyrgyzstan

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Introduction

Research media literacy level was conducted from 1 September till 30 November 2017 and commissioned by Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. The authors of the research sought to determine baseline level of media literacy of different population groups and to analyse external factors that affect the level and nature of media literacy.

Global Media Processes

Information is an important resource in a modern society. Its collection, processing, dissemination and use is one of the main production activities. Wide spread of digital

technologies removed barriers preventing access to information within and between countries in the world. Communication actors and sources of information have changed: mass media is no longer the main source of information, while states have lost their monopoly over information about themselves and compete for the opportunity to be the first to inform. New actors in the information field - social networks - have turned Internet users into sources and channels of news.

The evolution of methods and sources of information transmission and reception has brought to life such phenomena as "fake news" and "post-truth", which reflect both changes in media ecosystems and perception of information by individuals. Large flow of information and news pumped into the information space including through social media caused audience fatigue and changed their consumption habits. The essence of these changes boils down to the fact that information appeals to emotions and beliefs while individuals find themselves overwhelmed with large volume of information available online and sometimes exposed to malevolent information which is particularly risky for minors.

Therefore, this new media ecosystem requires a more complex set of skills for information consumers. Effective communication and exchange of information depends on the ability of consumers to find and evaluate information, to establish cause and effect relationship within information flows, to resist manipulations and to protect themselves from unreliable data, as well as to produce and disseminate content. Thus, evolution of the information society determines the need to develop new skills and qualities.

The set of these skills, necessary for a modern person, is described in the definition of media literacy adopted by the European Union in 2009: "Media literacy can be defined as the ability to receive, analyze and evaluate images, sounds and messages that we encounter daily, and which form an important part of our modern culture, as well as the ability to responsibly communicate in the accessible media and create media content. Media literacy applies to all media, including television and cinema, radio and music, print media, Internet and other new digital communication technologies".

This definition includes an important reference to human rights, calling media literacy a part of the basic human rights to freedom of speech, access to information and as a tool for maintaining democracy. This association of media literacy with human rights is not accidental and is expressed in the description of media literacy as a tool that "makes it possible to raise awareness of the person about the various forms of media that we encounter in everyday life. Media literacy should help a person to see how media acts as a filter that influences perceptions and beliefs, contemporary culture and personal choice. Media literacy is intended to empower a person with critical thinking skills and alternative solutions to make him/her a responsible consumer and information producer."

Therefore, today media literacy is one of the most important skills of a modern person which helps him to navigate effectively through the media space. Media literacy is represented by certain criteria of personal development such as the level of information culture (ability to work with information) and the level of perception, understanding, as well as interpretation of media texts (critical thinking).

These criteria are determined by the environment which surrounds an individual. One of the main studies of the media literacy level of the population, conducted in 2009 by the European Commission, has identified and determined environmental factors and individual competencies which determine the level of media literacy:

- Individual competencies include the ability to analyze, communicate, critically think, produce and transmit messages.
- Environmental factors are a number of contextual factors affecting individual competencies.
- These two categories were further divided into subgroups. Individual competences were divided into 1. Personal and 2. Social: competence in the field of use

(technical skills), analytical understanding (interpretation of media texts, critical thinking) and communicative competence (ability to establish social relations through media). The environmental factors were presented in five main areas: media education, media literacy policy, media industry, civil society and access to mass media.

Taking into account the above-described context and research tasks, the focus was on assessing habits of media consumption and search for information, attitude to the flow of information and critical thinking skills, attitude to civic engagement, content creation skills, protection of personal information, and knowledge of laws. These criteria, proposed and widely approved in the scientific literature, were developed in 2009 study of the media literacy skills of the population of the countries of the European Union. Similar criteria were also used in a study conducted by Moscow-based sociological group Zircon "Current Status and Prospects of Media Literacy of the Population of the Russian Federation Based on the National Monitoring of Media Behavior". It was conducted in several stages between 2009 and 2013.

Research methodology

Purpose of the research: to access the level of media literacy among different groups of the population in Kyrgyzstan

Target audience: men and women above 16 who live in Kyrgyzstan.

Objectives of the Research:

1. To identify the access to media devices and frequency of its use (taking into account age-related trends);
 - access to the Internet;
 - frequency of use of traditional and new media;
 - attitude to the flow of information and information sources;
 - actions taken by individuals when they come across inaccurate information (including verification of information);
 - skills and ability to analyse and access traditional and new media and their impact on society (including content analysis);
 - skills and ability of individuals to seek, understand and access information from traditional and new media, as well as to create and disseminate content which they have produced;
 - skills and ability to ensure digital security;
 - use of new media for civil mobilization and interaction.
2. To develop recommendations on how to increase the level of media literacy among different groups of population taking into account activities of other donors.

Data collection method

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection have been applied:

- **a field survey** based on a sampling which represents socio-demographic profile of the population of Kyrgyzstan (1,200 respondents);
 - **24 in-depth interviews** with journalists, media experts, teachers and researchers;
 - **13 focus groups** in six localities with participation of students, school children, parents, teachers, experts, etc.;
 - **case studies** described cases of media consumption in the context of urban and rural areas.
- During qualitative study, a number of approaches have been used, including the "snowball" method, as well as participant observation. All names have been changed or not mentioned at all.

Survey sample

A multistage cluster stratified sample representing the population of Kyrgyzstan by sex, age and type of settlement covering 1,200 people in seven localities (urban and rural areas) and two major cities (Bishkek and Osh), at least 48 villages.

Media literacy factors in the context of Kyrgyzstan (based on a desk and qualitative research)

Being part of global processes, Kyrgyzstan has been increasingly facing the problem of "fake news," the growing influence of social networks and new formats of media consumption. Every year the number of Kyrgyz citizens who speak foreign languages: English, Turkish, etc., grows. Consequently, the number of Kyrgyz citizens consuming news from foreign mass media also grows. In addition, more and more Kyrgyz citizens travel around the world, they receive education abroad and acquire new patterns of media consumption. One can note that the Commonwealth of Independent States, in its turn, has evolved into a separate media space sharing historical, cultural and political similarities. At the same time, not all global media literacy factors have rooted in Kyrgyzstan. A number of factors, internal and external, form unique patterns of media consumption in Kyrgyzstan.

Information sphere plays an important role in Kyrgyzstan both as a state and society. This is evidenced by a number of independent studies and focus groups conducted as part of this research. Television continues to be the main source of political information: 94% of the total number of interviewed citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic receive political information from television programmes. Television, along with other traditional sources of information, continues to enjoy a positive assessment of 72% of the broad public.

During in-depth interviews a number of experts explained that the population prefers television to other media sources due to the post-Soviet legacy. In the Soviet times, state bodies monopolized the information space and state-owned media outlets were the only source of reliable information.

"Older generation can not put under question information they receive from mass media, because they used to read and believe Pravda (Truth) newspaper". (Excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)

Secondly, increased availability of television after transition to digital broadcasting, which was completed in May 2017, has contributed to this pattern. Kyrgyzstan was one of the first countries in Central Asia that finalized transition to digital broadcasting, providing a level playing field for both public and private broadcasters, creating conditions for pluralism of opinions. As a result of the transition to digital broadcasting, terrestrial television covers 95% of the country's population, and the total number of TV channels available in three multiplexes in some regions has exceeded 40. Relatively broad access to terrestrial television can be considered a unique feature of the information space in Kyrgyzstan.

"Digital broadcasting covers 95% of the country. ... More than 15 channels are available across the country. ... The only issue which still remains to be addressed is the low literacy level of the audience. Television audience does not know who owns television channels, what type of information is broadcasted and why." (Interview with an expert, Bishkek)

At the same time, Kyrgyzstan is developing new technical solutions to disseminate information. The number of mobile subscribers significantly exceeds the number of residents (there are 7.49 million SIM-card owners in the country, while the population is 6.08 million people), and a significant number of mobile phones have access to the Internet. The accessibility of fiber-optic communication is growing. These factors create conditions for wide and unhindered access to various sources of information and shape new information consumption patterns.

According to the National Statistics Committee, the number of Kyrgyz citizens born between 1998 and 2016 is more than 40% of the population. That means a little less than half of Kyrgyzstanis were raised in the digital age and their media habits differ from those of an older

generation. The qualitative research has indicated that generational differences are more expressed when we look at the main source of information. Young people prefer receiving news (in the format of images and short videos) from social platforms via smartphones with the access to Internet (48% of the population). They communicate in small groups via WhatsApp and in communities on Instagram. For example, omks_kg, a community on Instagram, has more than 441,000 followers. The qualitative research also demonstrated that the most popular social platforms in Kyrgyzstan are Instagram (1,000,000 users aged 16 to 65), Facebook and Odnoklassniki (700,000 users aged 16 to 65) as well as V Kontakte (705,446 users aged 16 to 65). Thus, one can claim that youth, especially schoolchildren and students, are at the forefront of Internet know how and introduce new technologies to the everyday life. The increased accessibility of the Internet and its popularity as a communication platform has largely changed the habits of media consumption. At the same time, online publications, mail clients, messages in social networks and instant messengers are competing for the attention of each individual. This so-called "digital noise" reduces the amount of time spent on thoughtful reading. As a result many young people opt for scanning headlines to reading stories.

- *"I have 4G Internet in my smartphone, I have WiFi at home and we pay for it once every two months. Most often I access Internet through my mobile phone." (A 15-year old schoolboy during a focus group discussion in Naryn)*
- *"I receive information from various sources: Internet, friends, newspapers. When I have time, I watch KTRK (public broadcaster), but my main source of information is Instagram, WhatsApp, Google. I watch movies and TV shows on Youtube when I have no time to watch them on TV." (A 15-year old schoolboy during a focus group discussion in Naryn)*
- *"OMKS is the most popular group; everyone posts his or her opinion there, I post some information too, I have my own webpage". (A fourth-year female student during a focus group discussion in Bishkek)*

Digital noise and a large flow of information affect the ability of young people to critically assess information. Focus groups demonstrated that young people find it difficult to differentiate between official information from a reliable source and random speculations. Considering that almost every TV channel, newspaper or a news agency is represented on social networks, people shift from their official websites to their pages on Instagram, Facebook or Odnoklassniki and share news through WhatsApp. Information turns into an endless news feed where lines between truth and speculation are blurred. As a result, people are left with a feeling that broadcasting journalism is more reliable than information from social networks. This also explains why television remains an important source of information.

- *"The new generation is raised in front of a computer and with smartphones in their hands. As my friend says they are "educated lumberjacks with false eyelashes." (During an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"The percentage of those who visit our website from mobile devices has changed a lot: 80% of visits are from smartphones. It seems that people are less using computers." (During an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"Youth is watching much more content on smartphones than on TV. They learn about new developments in the morning before they are reported about on TV. They do not need to turn on TV in the evening. TV is turned on in areas with a low level of Internet penetration." (During an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

Younger generation is shaped by these trends and reflects these trends. The older generation is adapting to new patterns of media use, but use social media as an additional source of information which does not substitute traditional media. Media habits of older generation were formed in a different environment. The qualitative research also showed that media habits can gradually change under the influence of professional and personal circumstances, but older generation does not give up watching television in favour of social networks. These are the major generational differences which exist between different age groups in Kyrgyzstan. Socio-demographic factors within Kyrgyzstan often overlap with territorial ones. This, in particular, is associated with different levels of socio-economic development of the regions in Kyrgyzstan which determines both the level of Internet penetration as well as diversity of information resources available to the audience.

- *"I would not say that we do not watch TV at all. We watch it together with other family members. We watch entertainment shows during our leisure time."* (A 39-year old consultant during a focus group discussion in Bishkek)
- *"I learn about new developments on TV. I do not visit neither "Odnoklassniki" nor any other social media platforms."* (A 41-year-old accountant during a focus group discussion in Bishkek)

One can claim that digital gap in Kyrgyzstan is being reduced by the spread of mobile technologies and relatively low cost of mobile Internet. It is more relevant to speak about digital inequality in the context of Kyrgyzstan. Digital inequality was manifested in a combination of factors, such as availability of digital devices, digital skills and behavior in the Internet. For example, the qualitative research demonstrated that there was a lack of knowledge about information security and legal literacy among participants, in particular, about responsible use of the right for freedom of expression. In some cases it resulted in an unconscious violation of laws which instigated aggression or bullying, the so-called manhunt on the Internet. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan citizens have access to a variety of information sources and enjoy a relatively progressive legislation in the field of freedom of speech. These two factors can positively contribute to the development of media literacy.

- *"... knowledge about the role of media in a society, the right to freedom of speech ... and what opportunities it opens, understanding the essence of media regulation. This is important knowledge that lays the ground for media literacy in a democratic society."* (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)
- *"Users of social networks should be legally literate. In some countries, there are litigations for likes, shares and reposts on social media. Every social network has its own policy. There is a bulk of skills and knowledge that was not needed before, but it should be mastered in this new world."* (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)

According to experts, poor professionalism of local journalists is another specifics of the information field in Kyrgyzstan which affects media literacy. Despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan has the highest freedom of speech rankings in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan's journalists face many challenges. One of the main challenges is unprofessionalism of some journalists which undermines trust in the media. Due to slow development of the advertising market in Kyrgyzstan, development of high-quality local journalism is still in progress. As a result some media outlets are politically biased and struggle with journalistic ethics and self-regulation. Another important factor of the Kyrgyz media market is the presence of foreign broadcasters. Locally produced content often does not meet expectations and needs of the Kyrgyz audience which switches to foreign entertainment TV programmes of higher quality. When watching foreign TV channels Kyrgyzstanis unconsciously consume political agenda of another states and get to see the world news through a foreign lens. Currently, Kyrgyzstan continues to be within

the post-Soviet information space, which is characterized by a strong corporate control of the main sources of information.

- *"It is necessary to raise the professionalism of media. Current economic situation does not allow mass media to spend much time on investigations. Getting to the bottom of the truth is expensive. We are talking about the two functions of the media - influence and capacity. There is an influence, but there is not enough capacity." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"We need to work with the audience. As long as there is a demand for quality products, there will be supply. The audience educates the media." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"TV is watched mostly by an older generation, hence they fall under influence of other countries. In addition to that, they develop a critical attitude towards their own country." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

In the context of media literacy, it is important to speak about the role of state. In a new reality, public bodies compete for the attention of the audience together with social networks, media and even social network users. Public bodies in Kyrgyzstan communicate with the population through press offices. Press officers are gradually expanding the use of modern communication tools, however effective operation of press offices depends on sufficient staffing. Provided that a number of minimum staff in press offices is increased, many communication tasks will be solved effectively and in time. A new focus on greater transparency in communication is expected to improve ability of press offices to set information agenda and win over the audience.

- *"The first step to be undertaken by a state when fake news is identified to quickly debunk it. The second step is to prevent future spread of fake news through media literacy. This process has two integral components: professionalism of the state and professionalism of the media." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

Another important factor of media literacy in the context of Kyrgyzstan is polyethnicity and multilingualism of society. While this factor is conducive to nurturing of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, it also shapes a value gap between Kyrgyz and Russian-speaking audiences. As a result, Kyrgyz and Russian-speaking groups of the population exist in parallel information spaces. This fragmentation of the society spreads to social networks, where it deepens by filtering and personalization. As a result, users often find themselves in filter bubbles where people increasingly get affirmation of their views and beliefs. It has been proved by a number of research that filter bubbles reduce the space for dialogue and discussion. According to a research, only a quarter of all news that a person reads on Facebook opposes his or her beliefs. This ultimately leads to a significant polarization and fragmentation of the society. As a result, users focus only on a narrow area of their interests and do not see a broader picture.

- *"There are parallel universes in social networks. The so-called filter bubbles. Even if users interact, cultural values in the Russian-speaking Facebook differ significantly from the Kyrgyz-speaking." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"Russian-speaking and Kyrgyz-speaking Facebook differ even in terms of well-being of users, let alone information consumption habits." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

- *"Our information space is fragmented and segmented. We live in parallel universes. Messages which exist in one group either do not exist or differ in others." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- *"Regular users have an issue with critical thinking. They often do not know how to analyze, compare, or check information accuracy. It worries me a lot that in many cases people do not pause and think: should I check this information? We trust everything that confirms our beliefs." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

The issue of polarization of society takes us to the discussion of risks faced by Kyrgyztanis in traditional and online media. In our opinion, there are content-related, communication and cyber risks. Among the content risks, one cannot fail to mention the phenomenon of "fake news" or disinformation, which poses a serious challenge to the society and the media. Transnational in nature, "fake news" has been called word of the year by one of the oldest English dictionaries Collins. In the era of diffuse information borders, Kyrgyz people also fall under the influence of "fake news", and sometimes they become their creators and distributors. The danger of fake news lies in undermining people's trust in professional journalism, democratic institutions and in thwarting the processes of democratic decision-making. Captured in filter bubbles and misinformed by fake news, social network users express completely opposite views and fail to come to an agreement. Phenomenon of "fake news" is not a new to Kyrgyzstan. Until recently, spreading of rumors or so-called "ushaki" was a common style of journalism in Kyrgyzstan. Probably, Kyrgyzstan was among the first countries to set up the so-called an "anti-uhak" platform - an analogue of today's stop-fake initiatives.

"Ushaki" are very similar to the fake news. They are sensational and stir negative emotions which set aside critical thinking and ability to analyze. For this reason "ushaki" captured attention, they were quickly shared and frequently proved to be true. As a result, many Kyrgyztanis trust rumours and fake news. "Ushaki" was also a tool of informal political communication which described political sensations that were of great interest to the politicized Kyrgyz society. Collective type of Kyrgyz society, which largely determines frequent use of non-traditional social communication channels, such as word-of-mouth is one of the socio-cultural conditions that facilitate quick spread of rumors in Kyrgyzstan.

- *"Fake-news was born by Kyrgyz-speaking media. Their predecessors are ushaki." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek).*
- *"Fake-news is a fact of life that will strike harder and which should be fought back ... We are integrated into the Internet community, but we are not ready institutionally to deal with the fake news. The only way to prevent the spread of fake new is to increase the level of critical thinking of the audience." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek).*
- *"In general, Internet users are not capable of analyzing and fact checking information, they prefer trusting rumours. Media literate people are very few." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek).*
- *"In fact, mass media is a tool: either you control this tool or it controls you. In our case, it is the second scenario." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek).*
- *"Online news headlines attract are composed in such a way to capture attention of and intrigue Internet users. We get interested and read a news article which may*

be misleading. Therefore, I believe that news broadcasted on television is reliable and verified." (A fourth-year student during a focus group discussion in Bishkek).

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, the problem of fake news is implicated by the fact that the majority of Kyrgyzstanis, do not read or watch news in the original language. Language barriers often prevent them from going to the original source of information to check accuracy of the translation. This in turn limits the plurality of accessible media sources. For example, during the conflict in Myanmar, which dominated news headlines in September 2017, social networks were abundant of fake messages. These false and distorted pieces of information were widely debated in Kyrgyzstan, particularly among people of faith. Fake news were emotionally charged and resonated with the Kyrgyz audience who fell prey to these false facts.

Speaking about content risks, it is also important to note the risk of spreading violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan. Without critical thinking skills, ability to analytically evaluate information, and basic fact checking skills, users remain vulnerable to extremist ideology in social networks. In the long run, the threat of these factors can expand from a single person to security of a country.

- "The effect of television is in shaping of ideological views. Until our citizens do not speak English, they will not understand the difference of coverage on Euronews, CNN, Russia 24. Overall, television audience remains unaware that there are different points of view." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*
- "Radicalism is another factor which should not be underestimated in Kyrgyzstan. Youtube remains the main source of information for radical-minded youth. The risk of manipulation on Youtube is high." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

Communication risks posed by social networks are no less dangerous. Participants in the focus groups admitted that they faced aggression or bullying in social networks. The term "bullying" was first introduced by Norwegian psychologist D. Olweus (Olweus, 1993) and means "a deliberate, systematically repeated aggressive behavior involving the inequality of authority or power". This topic has not been thoroughly studied in Kyrgyzstan, but a negative effect of bullying has been recorded. In October 2017, a schoolgirl committed a suicide after being bullied by her peers in a WhatsApp group. In this regard, it is worth noting the results of a research conducted in Russia in 2014 which explored that "23% of children who use the Internet were victims of bullying online or offline in the last 12 months".

- "I posted my photo on Facebook. It was a little provocative. I have received a lot of accusations and negative comments. I had to delete it. It was very unpleasant." (A third-year student during a focus-group discussion in Bishkek)*
- "About two years ago, when we were all in Odnoklassniki, photos of a girl from our school were posted online by an anonymous account. Different people cursed her, wrote terrible comments under these photos. Then her account disappeared." (A 16-year old schoolgirl during a focus-group discussion in Cholpon-Ata)*

The "suicidal challenges" like "Blue Whale" which target teenagers can be also listed under communication risks. The news about these challenges was first broke in Kyrgyzstan in 2017 and caused serious concern among parents. Despite attempts to block such resources, since the beginning of the year more than 20 reports of "suicidal challenges" involving teenagers were registered in Kyrgyzstan. These figures are worrisome especially as neither schools nor parents are prepared to resist these challenges and to protect a child against possible risks. Focus group discussions with parents showed that parents have never heard about "parents control" in

the Internet and instead prefer to limit the time spent by their children online. Students likewise do not always have enough knowledge about how to protect themselves online.

- *"I registered on Facebook and Instagram to track my daughter's presence online. Sometimes I do not turn on Wi-Fi at home to make her work around the house." (A 45-year old financial manager during a focus group discussion in Bishkek)*
- *"My son is 15 years old and until recently he has not had a mobile phone. We wanted to protect him from negative impact of the Internet." (A 41-year-old accountant during a focus group discussion in Bishkek)*

In this context, it is important to note protection of the country's information infrastructure against cybercrime. This requires not only technical measures, but also intellectual capacity to develop and implement such measures.

As international practice shows, information risks are often abused to tighten legislation in the field of freedom of speech and access to information, and to introduce censorship. Bans and blocks restrict space for freedom of the media and lead to self-censorship. According to the 2017 research commissioned by BBC World Service, 60% of respondents expressed their opinion against the state regulation of the Internet despite the growing concern of Internet users around the world with the spread of false news. Obviously, rule-of-law state respecting democratic values and human rights, Kyrgyzstan can choose a path of education for combating information risks.

- *"Media literacy is an instrument that allows us to protect and realize human rights." (An excerpt from an interview with an expert in Bishkek)*

Conclusions

Media consumption

Television remains the main source of information for the majority of respondents. 97.2% of Kyrgyz citizens reported that they watch TV every day, several times a week or several times a month. 75.3% of Kyrgyz citizens watch TV on a daily basis. The percentage of those who watch TV is the highest among respondents over 52 years old. Young people under 24 also watch TV but only entertainment films, shows. Young people watch TV at home more often together with other family members. The amount of time spent by young people on watching TV is significantly smaller than the amount of time spent in messengers.

News is the most popular type of content consumed by the respondents on television and in newspapers. This statement however does not include youth. Young people show more interest in entertainment (music, movies, shows), as well as in sport.

Respondents said that they listen to radio programmes (news and entertainment) through radio receivers (46.0%) outside home or on the way home. Gradually, listening to the radio via a smartphone is getting more popular (26.4%) than listening via PC (9.3%). According to the survey, 71.8% of respondents have access to the Internet. These are mobile phone users and users with a fixed Internet access. Two third of respondents said they use a smartphone in their daily lives.

Young audience tend to consume media content in social networks and messengers (16-18 years old - 83.6%, 19-24 - 80.7%, 25-33 - 74.5%). Usually young people communicate simultaneously in at least two or three chats in messengers (related to work, study, or chats with friends). Messengers is a preferred source of information for youth, where they get information mostly in the form of video and pictures. In many cases news are shared hand in hand with fun content. Young people share equally often news about local and international developments as well as postings such as "URGENT! ATTENTION! SEND TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS!".

Most of respondents among young people do not read print media unlike representatives of an older generation. On the contrary, the percent of young people reading hard copies of books is higher compared to the adult audience. This is explained by the fact that many young people attend schools or universities and read books for their studies.

Youth aged between 16 to 24 uses smartphones to access Internet and it is expected that the number of young people will grow as high-speed mobile Internet is getting more accessible. The research showed that decreasing number of respondents watching television and the growing number of Internet users will soon meet at a crossing point. There are generational differences, but even older generations demonstrate growing preference to consumption of news content from online sources.

Attitude to the information flow and critical thinking skills

In general, despite a large amount of information, the young generation of Kyrgyzstanis, according to their own assessment, can easily navigate through information space and find important information. However, based on the focus group discussions, one can note that this self-assessment is overestimated.

On the one hand, young people have access to a variety of sources in social networks, on the other hand, as it was noted in the focus groups, young people do not differentiate between these sources as they merge into one flow.

Most respondents reported that they receive information from several sources. However, majority of respondents either ignore differences in the coverage or stick with interpretation of events suggested by their favourite source of information. Very limited amount of respondents compare information from different sources: when respondents notice contradictions very few decide to cross check it with the third source.

The majority of respondents answered that they are aware that the media has different forms of ownership in terms of funding. 48.1% of respondents said that it is important for them to know whose interests a mass media represent. One third of respondents (33.2%) noted that they do not attach importance to this and do not care who owns mass media they watch/read. The remaining 18.5% could not answer this question.

54.9% of respondents trust state-owned mass media, 14.9% could not answer this question, 13.6% trust privately-owned mass media. 8.4% of respondents trust both state and privately-owned mass media. In addition, 8.0% of the population said they do not trust mass media at all.

A third of respondents across the country reported that they trust foreign television channels. One fifth of respondents said that they trust foreign news agencies.

As focus groups showed, the lack of basic understanding of mass media production made respondents believe that broadcasted news cannot be doctored (or are difficult to be faked), and therefore television enjoys greater trust of respondents.

Focus group discussions showed that youth realizes that mass media can be manipulative. Young people know how to cross check information, but do that only when information is "interesting" or "important" to them. The audience also trust information which underpins what they already know. This is called confirmation bias - a tendency of a person to seek, interpret or give preference to information that is consistent with his/her point of view or assumptions. Eventually, these beliefs are solidified in "filter bubbles" which resist opposing views. In other cases, news flows in the background of everyday life as a mix of facts and fakes thus, first, undermining confidence in the media, and, secondly, leaving respondents in a "half-truth" limbo.

Civic participation and digital security

The needs of the audience in news and entertainment films and shows determine consumption habits. Quantitative research has confirmed assumptions made during focus groups that young people prefer to communicate online. They communicate and receive interactive news (supplemented by visuals, audio and video) via WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook.

The use of the Internet to express civic position, build relations with state bodies and policy makers, is still not very popular. Young people actively use social networks for communication, including intra-group communication. At the same time, young people do not always participate in open public discussions, for example, on Facebook. Young people do not actively create their own content, they often like or repost messages, as well as make comments on posts. However, the majority of respondents try to withstand from commenting on social media. This is partly due to the lack of legal background which an Internet user must have to abide by law or prevent bullying attempts.

Most of young people were either indifferent to politics or demonstrated very limited understanding of Kyrgyzstan's politics. Young people are mostly interested in events and infotainment that can be used for education or personal use. Nevertheless, there was a small number of young people (students of journalism and international relations departments) who expressed their civic position during focus group discussions and were extremely interested in political dynamics. There were also students who volunteered to participate in different initiatives.

The knowledge and understanding of the nexus between rights and responsibilities of spreading information was low. During focus group discussions, young people demonstrated a poor understanding of responsibility for their actions in the Internet. Young people have a sense of what information security is but its practical application is lagging behind.

Respondents who acknowledged there are laws which regulate dissemination of information, believe these laws are applicable to traditional media and should be respected by journalists. Respondents have either never realized or did not know that responsibility for dissemination of information is not limited to journalists, but is applicable to everyone.

With rare exceptions, focus group participants mentioned that they heard about an initiative to hold responsible internet users for dissemination of some categories of information. At the same time, enactment of laws to regulate dissemination of information was often interpreted by focus group participants as a restriction or censorship. Taking into account that young audience is the most active on social networks, it is obvious that there is a need to improve legal literacy of young people.

Thanks to the Internet, every person enjoys an access to information ever created and newly generated. However, as the survey shows, more than half of the respondents - Internet users - cannot be considered advanced users with high motivation for searching, interpreting and critical assessment of new information.

The results show that a large majority of respondents have very little knowledge about digital security and the risks that can arise during transfer of personal information. Respondents demonstrated a very low self-assessment of the following skills and abilities: installation of antivirus programs; use of parents control; spotting of cases of information extortion online; installing filters for spam or other unwanted messages in e-mail; checking computer for viruses; saving backup copies of files; removing junk files on a computer.

Moreover, most respondents did not know that the news in social networks and Internet are selected to match with their interests. Most respondents did not know that information about users of social networks is collected and sold to advertising companies. In addition, the majority of the population does not know that advertising companies can use personal data to sell their products in social networks.

Two thirds of respondents do not know that the term "anonymous" in the Internet is very relative and, if desired, any user can be identified and called for liability.

Half of respondents do not know how to change personal passwords in a PC and online platforms as well as settings for accessing their information on social networks, and do not know how to delete history of their actions in the Internet as well.

The respondents aged 16 to 42 are the most technically advanced users.

Recommendations

Media literacy should be developed comprehensively through interventions at individual, organisational and institutional levels.

Changes at the institutional level will require more time and investments, but will create a basis for sustainable and lasting development. In a short term, interventions can be made at individual and organisational levels to stimulate fundamental changes at the institutional level.

Recommendations to the state bodies

- To take measures to promote development of media literacy with an emphasis on critical thinking by including media literacy into curriculum of educational institutions starting from undergraduate programmes, and through cooperation with civil society representatives and other stakeholders engaged in the development of media literacy;
- To include in media literacy curriculum digital (computer) literacy, training on online security, confidentiality and personal data protection;

- ensuring freedom to disseminate information in accordance with international standards, so that journalists can fulfill their professional duties without fear of being persecuted and sued for criticism of state policies, government or public officials.

Recommendations for civil society

- To act as an intermediary between representatives of public authorities, academic circles, civil society, journalist community and to initiate a forum on media literacy development in Kyrgyzstan which will analyse current state of affairs and define media literacy development priorities in Kyrgyzstan;
- To contribute to the development of a national media literacy curriculum and standards, training of media literacy educators, as well as to assess level of media literacy of population;
- To launch a fact-checking platform or another technological know-how similar to factcheck.kz, factcheck.org, factcheck.ge, factcheck.com.ua to debunk fake news and information manipulation through regular monitoring and verification of information which represents public interest;
- To draft a code of corporate and professional ethics in social networks for employees of government, private and non-profit organizations;
- To conduct awareness campaigns among children and parents about online risks to personal security, including bullying, in particular with regard to confidentiality and personal data protection;
- To promote awareness about media literacy among schoolchildren and students through short-term online courses in traditional and new media focusing on development of critical thinking, functions of the media, and responsible web content development;
- To conduct awareness raising campaigns or short-term courses to increase understanding among broad public about the role of media in society, media regulation, right to freedom of expression and responsibility in exercising this right;
- To undertake an attempt to introduce transparency of media ownership to the legal framework to reduce the risks of manipulating public opinion.

Recommendations to the mass media

- To ensure editorial transparency of private mass media, including a clear visual difference between advertisements and editorials;
- To improve professional qualifications of current and future journalists in fact-checking, as well as using open data through peer-to-peer sessions;
- To initiate by a media self-regulatory body development of professional ethics provisions in social networks for journalists and opinion makers, including standards on accuracy in reporting to prevent dissemination of misleading information, disinformation, and fake news;
- To consider possibility of drafting analysis of articles with misleading information on issues of high public interest, as well as guidelines on critical consumption of information;

- To draft analysis highlighting the scale and threat posed by information manipulation and fake news to the trust in democratic institutions, as well as inciting conflicts on the theme of nationalism, religion, ethnicity, race or gender.

Recommendations to donors and international organisations

- To promote development of media literacy curriculum, pedagogical staff training and development of teaching aids through organisation of exchange visits to countries with well-established programmes in media literacy and media education;
- To consider funding of a fact-checking platform or another technological know-how to debunk misleading information, information manipulation and fake news through regular monitoring and verification of information which represents public interest.
- To raise awareness about public role of media, regulation on media and dissemination of information, right to freedom of speech and expression and responsibility it comes with.

Logical framework (matrix of indicators)

| No | An indicator | Baseline % | Interim data % | Final date % |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| Percent of population that: | | | | |
| 1. | Owns a TV set | 94,5 | | |
| 2. | Owns a smartphone | 67,7 | | |
| 3. | Owns a push-button mobile phone | 40,5 | | |
| 4. | Owns a PC | 23,7 | | |
| 5. | Owns a book reader | 0,3 | | |

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|----|---|------|--|--|
| 6. | Watches video programmes/shows on television regularly, including: | 97,2 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 75,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 14,1 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 4,6 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 3,2 | | |
| 7. | Watches video programmes/shows on a tablet regularly, including: | 25,3 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 3,4 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 5,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 6,4 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 10,2 | | |
| 8. | Watches video programmes/shows in a smartphone regularly, including | 57,0 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 8,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 15,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 20,1 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 12,8 | | |
| 9. | Listens to the radio via radio transmitter: | 46,0 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 13,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 14,1 | | |

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| | <i>several times a month</i> | 10,6 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 8,0 | | |
| 10. | Listens to the radio with a smartphone: | 26,4 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 2,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 5,6 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 7,5 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 10,5 | | |
| 11. | Listen to the radio via PC/laptop/tablet: | 9,3 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 0,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 2,0 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 2,7 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 3,8 | | |
| 12. | Read newspapers (hard copies) | 63,7 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 5,6 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 20,6 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 18,0 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 19,5 | | |
| 13. | Reads books (hard copies) | 43,3 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 5,9 | | |

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| | <i>several times a week</i> | 7,5 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 8,8 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 21,1 | | |
| 14. | Reads books online on special reading devices: | 5,8 | | |
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| | <i>every day</i> | 1,6 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 3,5 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 3,8 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 9,6 | | |
| 18. | Plays online computer games on a smartphone | 31,9 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 2,9 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 6,4 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 10,8 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 11,8 | | |
| 19. | Visits web-sites on a PC/tablet/laptop: | 26,7 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 5,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 7,1 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 6,8 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 7,0 | | |
| 20. | Visits web-sites on a smartphone: | 61,8 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 21,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 20,7 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 13,3 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 6,0 | | |

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| 21. | Accesses social networks on a PC/tablet/laptop: | 27,5 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 6,5 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 7,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 5,7 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 8,0 | | |
| 22. | Accesses social networks on a smartphone | 65,9 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 37,6 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 12,7 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 10,3 | | |
| | <i>less than ones in a month</i> | 5,3 | | |
| 23. | Opens messengers (WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook messenger) in a smartphone: | 70,4 | | |
| | <i>every day</i> | 62,3 | | |
| | <i>several times a week</i> | 4,8 | | |
| | <i>several times a month</i> | 2,3 | | |

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| 26. | Acted in messengers to heel public attention to an issue of high public interest | 8,9 | | |
| 27. | Believes that different media cover a similar event differently | 51,8 | | |
| 28. | Believes that media sources can be both state and privately owned | 73,4 | | |
| 29. | Ponders about ownership of the media they were reading/watching | 48,2 | | |
| 30. | Trusts foreign TV channels | 37,3 | | |
| 31. | Trusts foreign news websites | 14,5 | | |
| 32. | Knows that dissemination of information is regulated by laws of the Kyrgyz Republic | 8,7 | | |
| 33. | Heard something about bullying in social media | 18,0 | | |
| 34. | Knows where to go in case of being threatened to be bullied yb Internet users | 9,0 | | |
| 35. | Knows how to clear browsing history of visits on the Internet | 53,4 | | |
| 36. | Knows how to change passwords on a PC or on the social networks | 50,6 | | |
| 36. | Knows how to change personal settings in social networks | 43,1 | | |
| 37. | Knows how to clean a PC from junk | 37,0 | | |

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| 38. | Knows how to scan a PC for viruses | 24,6 | | |
| 39. | Knows how to make backup copies of files stored on a PC | 24,8 | | |
| 40. | Knows how to activate parental control function | 19,6 | | |
| 41. | Knows how to spot an attempt to extort information in the Internet | 20,8 | | |
| 42. | Knows how to set up spam filters | 20,1 | | |
| 43. | Knows how to install anti-virus programs | 18,1 | | |
| 44. | Knows that “anonymity” on the Internet is relative | 32,8 | | |
| 45. | Knows that personal data of social network users is collected and sold to advertising companies | 19,3 | | |
| 46. | Knows that advertising companies use personal data of social network users to promote and sell products on the Internet | 17,5 | | |
| 47. | Knows that news are collected online to match their interest | 21,6 | | |